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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SECRETARY CLINTON'S ASIA TRIP

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused February 25 news coverage on former President Chen Shui-bian, who pleaded not guilty to corruption charges in a pretrial hearing Tuesday; on Taiwan's sagging economy and on the debate between the ruling and opposition parties over whether Taiwan should sign a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with China. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said it is still too early to rate Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's recent trip to China as both sides are still at the stage of "testing the waters." A column in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" hailed Clinton's visit to China and said that "both countries appear to share a sense of global responsibility and are willing to work together on the two main challenges facing the world today: the continuing international financial crisis as well as climate change." An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," however, called Clinton's move to "de-link human rights from other U.S. concerns" an "unwise decision." End summary.

A) "Hillary Clinton's Maiden Visit -- Neither Big Talk nor Action"

Apple Daily Publisher James Tu wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (2/25):

"... U.S.-China relations are essential for both Washington and Beijing. On the Chinese side, it goes without saying that [Chinese President] Hu Jintao will take the lead in such relations. For the United States, however, unless the relationship was personally dominated by the president himself, such as [former Presidents] Richard Nixon, George Bush and George W. Bush, it would normally be handed over to the people that the president trusted most, such as Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor to [former] President Jimmy Carter Zbigniew Brzezinski, and National Security Advisor to [former] President Bill Clinton Sandy Berger. Since Sino-U.S. relations are very complicated and have many ramifications, and they normally involve many agencies, one can hardly control [every aspect] without adequate authority. Hillary Clinton is a rival that [U.S. President Barack] Obama had to elevate for sake of solidarity in the Democratic Party, and she is definitely not one of his trusted subordinates. Obama has not had time yet to touch on the China issue, let alone control it. Now is still too early to tell who will be Obama's trusted subordinates in the future, but in the end it will not be Hillary Clinton. In that vein, now is too early to give a high rating to Clinton's visit to China. China's Xinhua News Agency did not exaggerate it when it addressed Clinton's China visit as a 'journey to test the waters.' Perhaps it will take a very long time for both Washington and Beijing to walk out of the stage of feeling their way [toward a new relationship]."

B) "Clinton's China Trip Focuses on Positive"

Columnist Frank Ching noted in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] (2/25):

"Hillary Clinton's visit to China -- the most important leg of her trip to Asia, which included Japan, Indonesia and South Korea --

went off well, in part because the U.S. secretary of state had indicated publicly ahead of time that differences over human rights would not be allowed to inhibit progress on other matters. ... Clinton's pragmatic attitude enabled her not only to demonstrate the Obama administration's desire to work with China, it also enabled her to demonstrate the American commitment to human rights without poking China in the eye. ... No doubt problems will arise in future but, for now, both countries appear to share a sense of global responsibility and are willing to work together on the two main challenges facing the world today: the continuing international financial crisis as well as climate change. ..."

C) "Clinton's Unwise Choice to Appease China?"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (2/25):

"The first diplomatic excursion by new United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton began with expectation and ended in discouragement for hopes that the new Democratic administration of President Barack Obama will fulfill its promise to renew American democratic leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. ... Washington certainly needs China's cooperation on many issues, including regional security, energy and climate change and global economics and finance, but it should also be evident that the willingness of the PRC to cooperate with the U.S. is limited by the ingrained suspicion by the Chinese Communist Party regime that the U.S. and other democracies, including Taiwan, are threats to its expansionist ambitions and even its survival. ... Unfortunately, Clinton may not realize that while Washington needs some cooperation from Beijing, the PRC is even more in need of "cooperation" from the United States since the dynamism of the Chinese economy is now largely reliant on foreign investment and access to markets in the United States,

Europe and Japan for its merchandise exports.

"Clinton's unwise decision to de-link human rights from other U.S. concerns and her failure to insist that Beijing abide by key universal principles in handling issues such as labor standards, environmental protection, human rights and Tibet and Taiwan will send a wrong message to both the world community and Asia. Unintended side-effects will include the discouragement of activism for democracy and human rights within China, the granting of Beijing an even freer hand to throw its military and diplomatic weight, especially in relation to Taiwan and Tibet, and, ironically, the erosion of Washington's leverage in bargaining with Beijing on economic issues. After years during which the Bush administration sacrificed American democratic values, interests and credibility for the expediency of his obsessive war on Iraq, the community of nations in Asia, including Taiwan, need a new American leadership who will not hand over leadership in Asia to an authoritarian China. Unfortunately, such leadership has yet to appear."

WANG